

MCPON Remarks at Christening of USNS Carl Brashear
18 September 2008

Good morning, Admiral Roughead, the Brashear family, distinguished guests, and my fellow Sailors...thank you for that warm welcome.

I am truly honored to be part of this morning's ceremony.

We pay tribute to a great man today. A son, a father, a mentor and one of the finest Sailors this Navy has ever known. All of us here know Carl Brashear's legacy as the first African American deep sea diver and the first amputee to return to active duty.

It's well known in our Navy, and with the movie, "Men of Honor", his story has come to represent the character of our nation and the courage and the strength to achieve the near impossible.

Carl Brashear's legacy may have been developed through his time in the Navy, but his story belongs to many more than just those of us who wear the uniform.

His story is one of the American spirit, nurtured on a farm in Kentucky. And one that will live forever on the deckplates of this ship and in the heart of every Sailor. The character of our Navy changed the day Carl Brashear decided nothing was going to stop him from pursuing his dreams.

Years later he lost a leg, but not his will or his tenacity. If anything, he demanded more from himself and of the Navy he loved.

Although our Navy core values were adopted in 1992, I believe they very well could have been born the day Carl Brashear refused to give up being a Navy diver. He made us see the value of staying true to ourselves and true to what we know to be right and just.

He proved to us all that when a Sailor is given the opportunity to succeed and they have the will, nothing is beyond their reach.

Carl lived the essence of honor, courage and commitment.

The challenges he overcame helped shape his character, but didn't fully define who he was. As much as he loved our Navy, he was equally committed to his family and cherished his role as a father.

His son Phillip told me that when he was called back from Iraq to his father's bedside...it struck him that Carl was the one providing comfort and fatherly advice even as the end of his life drew near.

Carl's family accepted that much of his career was spent at sea.

They understood his desire to serve our nation and looked up to him as a military man devoted to preserving the freedoms we enjoy as Americans.

His Sailors viewed Carl in much the same way. Just as he cared for and loved his children, he mentored hundreds of men and women, with a special gift for taking that young troubled Sailor and helping them see something in themselves they didn't know existed.

Undoubtedly, he used our great heritage as a means to introduce those Sailors to who we are and what we stand for.

He showed them what they were capable of and told them of the sacrifices made by the Sailors who fought in battles long since past, battles atop our world's oceans and cultural battles back home.

In his oral history Carl tells the story of diving the waters around USS Arizona in late 1961.

Designs were in the works for the memorial and it was up to Carl and his crew to determine the sunken battleship's degree of list. By this time in his career, Carl had experience diving all over the world, but he described his dive on the Arizona like no other.

He said the waters just felt different.

It was not lost on him that he was diving on the resting place of eleven hundred brave souls. He felt he was in the presence of honorable men, that he was diving in hallowed waters. I know Carl would say that any Sailor who dies in service of their country deserves a day like today. And he would be humbled that we christen a ship in his name, honoring him for his service.

When I think of Carl Brashear I consider the impact he's had on so many of our Sailors.

I know he'd be proud of each of them, just as we all are. Each time I visit our youngest Sailors, at sea or in some of the world's most dangerous places, I leave with a question I never stop asking myself:

Where do we find the sons and daughters who value the ideals of this nation so much that they would volunteer to defend it at all costs?

Where do we find young men and women so valiant, so dedicated?

I believe their spirit is a reflection of our Navy as a whole. And when I look into the eyes of those young Sailors, I see Carl's legacy staring back.

Two days ago we pinned anchors on the collars of more than four thousand new Chiefs. As part of their training, they came to understand that their new responsibilities were cast by men like Master Chief Carl Brashear. Carl displayed a brand of leadership that we must continue to blanket our Navy with.

I have charged all our new Chiefs to never forget the courage of Carl Brashear or the dedication he had to this Navy and this nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, we honor a great man today. And in doing so we pay tribute to a great American family.

To the Brashears, I'd like to leave you with this: his honor is yours.

Just as you share his name, you share the immense respect of the entire united states Navy.

We will forever remember Carl Brashear as a Sailor, a diver and a devoted father.

But on this day, with the christening of *this* ship, we remember him as a good Chief, a proud American and a man of honor.

Thank you.

